

Thinkers and Movements in Christian Ethics:
The Ethics of H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr

CHR 440
3 hours credit
MWF 11-11:50 a.m

Dr. David P. Gushee
Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy
Senior Fellow, Center for Christian Leadership

Office: Jennings 328	Office Hours: MWF 2-5 & by appointment
Tel: 731-661-5024 (o), 668-9837 (h)	Email: dgushee@uu.edu
Fax: 731-661-5118	
Websites: www.uu.edu/personal/dgushee www.uu.edu/centers/christld	

I. Course Description

Thorough examination of a major movement or thinker in either historic or contemporary Christian ethics, taught in seminar style. Pre- or co-requisite: CHR 243. *Subject Fall 2003: Ethics of H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr.*

II. Course Objectives

- A. To develop a deeper understanding of the academic discipline of Christian ethics.
- B. To become familiar with the ethics of the Niebuhr brothers in historical perspective.
- C. To improve in the ability to interact critically with advanced literature in Christian ethics.
- D. To nurture the early growth of a constructive Christian ethical perspective and methodology.
- E. To become prepared for graduate level work in Christian ethics.
- F. To develop intellectual flexibility and openness to diverse perspectives within the context of appropriate confessional and biblical boundaries.
- G. To achieve personal moral growth.

III. Textbooks and Assigned Reading

A. The required texts are the following:

Books by H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962):

Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (1943).

Christ and Culture (1951)

The Responsible Self (1963)

Books by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971):

Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932)

Collected essays:

Love and Justice (ed. Robertson)

Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life (ed. Rasmussen)

B. Suggestions for further reading will be given throughout the semester.

You are responsible for reading assigned material *before* coming to class. This is absolutely essential in a seminar class.

IV. Method of Instruction

A. Class time will be spent primarily in seminar presentations and class interaction with them. All students will need to be well-prepared for class conversation. This is entirely a reading-based class, and we will follow the reading very closely all term.

B. Exams and papers are considered part of the instructional process as well as testing measures.

V. Course Requirements and Methods of Evaluation

A. Your grade for the term will be determined as follows:

Seminar Papers.....	100 points
Exams.....	200 points
Term Paper.....	150 points
Participation.....	50 points
Extra Credit.....	up to 50 points

The official Union University grading scale will be used in the course. Translated into point values, it runs as follows:

475-500 A 425-474 B 375-424 C 325-374 D 0-324 F

B. Here is a description of each course requirement:

1. *Seminar Papers*. At least two times during the semester you will present a 4-5 page seminar paper on the day's assigned reading. This paper should very briefly summarize the content of the reading, interact critically with it, perhaps bring the reading into dialogue with other class readings and materials and/or current events, and suggest several discussion questions for the day's class period. You will have a maximum of 15 minutes to present your paper or a summary of it. Each paper is worth 50 points.

2. *Exams* (10/15, final exam). These exams will each cover one of our two figures and will be contain both objective and essay components.

3. *Term Paper* (due 12/1). This is your major project for the semester. Your task is to write a 18-20 page paper on some aspect of the ethics of Richard and/or Reinhold Niebuhr. More details on this assignment will be given later in the term.

4. *Participation/Attendance*. In a class of this type, exemplary attendance and participation are expected. I assume you will be here unless an emergency prevents you from doing so, and that you will inform me if such occasions arise. I also assume you will undertake serious preparation for class and significant and constructive class participation. In this class, participation will count for 10 percent (or fifty points) of your grade. For other aspects of my attendance policy, see below.

5. *Extra Credit*. You can gain up to 25 points extra credit by attending a Mars Hill Forum or other major guest speaker/event on campus, and then writing a 3-4 page reflection paper on the event. Alternatively, you can gain up to 50 points by writing an extra seminar paper on a day when no one is assigned the reading. The paper will be graded according to the same criteria as regular seminar papers. I am hoping to have several of you take me up on this offer.

ACADEMIC POLICY STATEMENTS

Note: Apply all items below that are relevant to this course.

On Papers and Their Presentation: I prefer to receive papers in 12-point Times New Roman font, printed on a well-functioning printer, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, no plastic covers needed. Term papers should be double-spaced, follow the Chicago Manual of Style (Turabian),

with a full bibliography including all works cited. While small variations in referencing style are common, be consistent with whatever form you employ throughout the paper. Paper grades include consideration of both literary/presentation quality and substantive content. Use inclusive language with reference to human beings.

On Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft in which a writer passes off someone else's words as his or her own, either intentionally or unintentionally (through inadequate quotation use and footnoting). While intention is sometimes hard to judge, intentional plagiarism is expressly forbidden and will result in automatic failure, as discussed in the Union catalog. All other forms of cheating are, of course, forbidden as well.

On Late Work: All papers and assignments are due at the start of class on the date assigned. Papers lose 5 points credit for every day that they are late, excluding Sundays. Papers turned in after the start of class are treated as if turned in the next day. If you turn in a late paper, be sure to note on the paper the date and time it was turned in. The *only* exceptions to this policy include family emergencies and bereavement. Absence from class due to official college functions does not constitute grounds for a no-penalty extension on a paper, nor do computer problems, relationship hassles, or other common stresses of university life. *Remember that seminar papers cannot be turned in late, because they are the basis for daily discussion.*

On Lost Papers: Students are wise to keep both a hard copy and a computer version of every paper they write. If a paper turns up missing in this class, you are responsible for turning in a replacement version as soon as we discover the paper is missing.

On Attendance and Participation:

A. Regular class attendance is required for the successful completion of this course. The student is expected to attend classes regularly in accordance with Union's attendance policies. See catalog for official policy statement.

B. Class absences will be considered in two categories: excused and unexcused.

C. Excused absences include the following: emergencies, bereavement, or official college functions approved by the Academic Affairs Office. The professor reserves the right to determine the validity of all absences.

D. Request for an absence to be excused must be made *in writing* either in advance of the absence or at the next class attended after the absence. Verbal communication of the absence or its reasons is insufficient.

E. If an exam is missed because of an excused absence, it may be made up. If the absence is unexcused, the student receives a 0 on that exam. This includes exams missed due to oversleeping. Whenever a student has advance knowledge that an exam must be missed due to an excused absence, the professor should be informed so that arrangements can be made.

F. Excessive absences by a student will be reported to the appropriate officials for counsel with the student.

G. Absences will be penalized as follows:

3 absences – ½ letter grade

4 absences – 1 letter grade

5 absences – 2 letter grades

6 or more absences – fail the class

H. Tardiness--arrival in class at any point after it starts--will be counted against the attendance grade. *Three tardies=one absence.*

I. Participation--The criteria of quality participation include the following: obvious completion of reading prior to coming to class, intelligent and informed participation in classroom discussion and any assigned projects or tasks, evidence of note-taking and active listening, and general quality of demeanor, engagement, and enthusiasm for course activities.

VI. Course Schedule

- 8/27 Syllabus and organization
- 8/29 Introducing the Niebuhrs and Their Era (*Reinhold Niebuhr*, 1-16; handout on HRN; skim forewords, introductions, prefaces)
- 9/1 Labor Day--no class

PART ONE: THE ETHICS OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR

- 9/3 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chs. 1-2
Seminar paper:
- 9/5 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chs. 3-4
Seminar paper:
- 9/8 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chs. 5-6
Seminar paper:
- 9/10 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chs. 7-8
Seminar paper:
- 9/12 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chs. 9-10
Seminar paper:
- 9/15 *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life*, ch. 3
Seminar paper:
- 9/17 *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life*, ch. 4
Seminar paper:
- 9/19 *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life*, ch. 5
Seminar paper:
- 9/22 *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life*, ch. 6
Seminar paper:
- 9/24 *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life*, ch. 7
Seminar paper:
- 9/26 *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life*, chs. 9-12
Seminar paper:

9/29 *Love and Justice*, Pt. I

Seminar paper:

10/1 *Love and Justice*, Pt. IIA-B

Seminar paper:

10/3 *Love and Justice*, Pt. IIC-D

Seminar paper:

10/6 *Love and Justice*, Pt. IIIA

Seminar paper:

10/8 *Love and Justice*, Pt. IIIB-D

Seminar paper:

10/10 *Love and Justice*, Pt. IV

Seminar paper:

10/13 Reflections on Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics (reread all forewords, prefaces, etc.)

10/15 **Midterm Exam I**

10/17 Fall Break

SECTION TWO: THE ETHICS OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

10/20 *Radical Monotheism*, chs. I-II

Seminar paper:

10/22 *Radical Monotheism*, chs. III-IV

Seminar paper:

10/24 *Radical Monotheism*, chs. V-VI

Seminar paper:

10/27 *Radical Monotheism*, supplementary essays

Seminar paper:

10/29 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 1

Seminar paper:

10/31 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 2
Seminar paper:

11/3 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 3
Seminar paper:

11/5 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 4
Seminar paper:

11/7 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 5
Seminar paper:

11/10 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 6
Seminar paper:

11/12 *Christ and Culture*, ch. 7
Seminar paper:

11/14 *Responsible Self*, ch. 1
Seminar paper:

11/17 *Responsible Self*, ch. 2
Seminar paper:

11/19 *Responsible Self*, ch. 3
Seminar paper:

11/21 *Responsible Self*, ch. 4
Seminar paper:

11/24 *class cancelled*

11/26-28 Thanksgiving Holidays

12/1 *Responsible Self*, ch. 5, appendix
Term paper due

12/3 Reflections on H. Richard Niebuhr's Ethics (reread all forewords, prefaces, etc.)

12/5 Assessing the Legacy of the Niebuhrs for Contemporary Christian Ethics

TBA **Final Exam**